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— U.S. Rep. John Tanner

Gibson EMC helps Williams Sausage expand

The year 2008 marked the 50th anniversary for the Williams Sausage Company Inc. — an impressive milestone for the meat processing plant located in a rural area of Obion County. And now, 2009 has proven to be another banner year — a major expansion of the plant, which began in August, will increase the size of the existing 100,000-square-foot facility to 140,000 square feet.

The expansion also means new equipment, an increase in the plant's workforce over the next two years (from 242 to 342) and specialized training for many of its employees.

U.S. Rep. John Tanner, along with Gibson Electric Membership Corporation, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development and other local, state and federal officials, recently traveled to the Williams Sausage plant to congratulate employees on their success and participate in a ceremonial check presentation.

"We are proud of initiatives that help create private sector jobs in northwest Tennessee," Tanner said. "Small businesses are the key to recovery, economic development and job creation." He commended owners Roger and David Williams for the important role they play as employers and commended the partnerships of Rural Development and Gibson EMC in securing funds to assist with the plant expansion.

As a rural electric cooperative and recipient of USDA Rural Utility Services funding, Gibson EMC qualifies for participation in USDA's Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants (REDLG) initiative, explained Gibson EMC President and CEO Dan Rodamaker. "We went through an extensive application process and were awarded a 10-year, zero-interest REDLG loan in the amount of \$740,000," he says.

"Williams Sausage met the job creation, capital investment and financial requirements for our own economic development efforts, so we simply will pass through the entire loan to Williams Sausage at the same terms."

Plans for an expansion have been in the works for a while, said Roger Williams, adding that the REDLG loan will help them go forward with these plans. "We are thankful to those who had a hand in securing this loan for us, especially in such tough economic times," he said.

Williams Sausage was founded in 1958 by Harold and Hazel Williams on their family farm near Woodland Mills. In the early days, Mrs. Williams often hand-sewed the cloth sausage bags while Mr. Williams trucked the whole-hog sausage to local retail outlets.

Today the plant occupies a prominent place at the original site, displaying many modern touches that have been added through the years. Among these are a spiral freezer that reduces the temperature of a cooked sausage product from 170 degrees to zero degrees in 30 minutes, high-speed packaging equipment that can process 600,000 pounds of product per week and a fleet of refrigerated trucks delivering 250 individual pork products to 20 states.

Now marketed under the Williams label and private labels are raw, whole-hog and pork breakfast sausage packed as chubs and patties, skinless links and artificial casing links; precooked whole-hog and pork sausage patties; fully-cooked microwavable sandwiches such as sausage biscuits, sausage-egg-cheese biscuits and sausage-egg-cheese croissants; and even cured ham and bacon products.

An important Obion County employer and one of Gibson EMC's key industrial accounts, Williams Sausage also is a testament to hard work and family values.

A second generation, brothers Roger and David Williams, now manage the company and do so with the attention to quality and detail that they learned from their parents.

They have great pride in their product ... after all, that's their family name on the label.



From left, Williams Sausage Vice President David Williams and President Roger Williams discuss their plant's expansion plans with USDA Rural Development Area Director Bobby Goode, U.S. Rep. John Tanner, Gibson EMC President and CEO Dan Rodamaker and USDA Rural Development Acting State Director Bob Connelly.